
*Policy: Critical Incident
Recovery Policy and Plan*

School: Benalla P-12 College

Section: General 1.3

Version: Three

Critical Incident Recovery Policy and Plan

1. Characteristics of Traumatic or Critical Incidents

Some events are readily characterised as emergencies. Major emergencies demand a full scale response involving external support from the emergency services and range of agencies. Other events may be less severe or may require a response which can be managed using school resources. Principals and teachers have responsibilities to fulfil under the school emergency management plan and will assess each incident carefully. Many types of emergencies will be similar, but the circumstances in which they occur will usually be different. Each event will be considered according to the circumstances at the time to determine the appropriate level of response.

Traumatic incidents tend to have characteristics in common. They:

- are extremely dangerous or distressing
- are sudden and unexpected, providing no opportunity to prepare for them
- disrupt one's sense of control of events around them
- disrupt one's beliefs and assumptions about the world, people and work
- challenge the belief that the world is a fair and equitable place
- challenge the belief that events can be understood
- include elements of physical or emotional loss or risk of loss.

School personnel are required to respond effectively and efficiently to emergencies which affect their school community. Emergencies which school personnel may be expected to deal with include:

- the murder or serious injury of a student or staff member
- suicide of a teacher or student
- sexual or physical assault
- acts of violence or threats of violence
- death of a student from a terminal illness
- siege, hostage, abduction, missing student
- diagnosis of a life threatening illness of a teacher
- physically destructive events such as fire, flood, lightning, windstorm
- life-threatening injury on school excursion.
- mandatory report of abuse of a student
- the cumulative effect of a series of small scale incidents
- media coverage of a sensitive issue
- serious injury or death resulting from a motor vehicle collision.

2. Responding to a Traumatic or Critical Incident in which the School is involved

Schools may become directly or indirectly involved in a tragic or traumatic event.

The incident may involve loss of life, serious injury or emotional disturbance. The incident may occur in the school environment or outside. It may involve staff, students or those close to them. The network of those involved in a traumatic event can be wide, especially if it directly involves the school. Feelings of grief and loss can continue over long periods of time.

Counselling should be provided for all those who need it. This may include many who do not seem to be closely connected to the event or the individuals involved. The school may be in a position to help grieving families at difficult times, e.g. through the school's participation in the funeral service. While school should operate as normally as possible, some degree of flexibility should exist. It is essential that people be given clear, accurate information at all times. It is essential that a Emergency Response Team be formed to manage the short and long term effects.

3. Action to be taken as a result of a Tragic/Traumatic Event which involves the School

3.1 Incidents vary in complexity. These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases.

3.2 However, the following 4 principles must be followed:

1. provide clear, accurate information
2. describe the actions to be followed
3. provide help for all affected
4. maintain a normal school program as close as possible

3.3 Obtain accurate information. Deal only with substantiated facts.

3.4 As soon as possible inform staff, especially those most directly involved. Inform close friends and family individually. Allow questions and discussion as they arise. Dispel rumours.

3.5 Appoint a skilled Emergency Response Team to assist in the management of the incident. The team may include staff members, psychologists, counsellors, external DET personnel, support agencies etc. The size and composition of the team will be related to the nature of the incident. Distribute names of the Critical Incident Recovery Team members, and inform others of the role of the team.

3.6 As soon as possible provide information to the community as to what has happened, and what is being done.

3.7 Appoint a skilled Emergency Response Team to respond to media enquiries. A written press release may be useful. If necessary, protect others from contact with the media. Advice regarding this may be obtained from the DET Emergency Communications Centre and the DET Media Unit.

3.8 Establish an open line of contact with the family or families directly involved.

3.9 Provide out of school hours contact if necessary. This could be as simple as circulating the Principal's telephone number. In more complex situations it may mean maintaining telephone contact at the school.

3.10 Continue contact with the family to identify their expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.

3.11 Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends. Some students not directly affected may become distressed.

3.12 Ensure that counselling help is available. Contact the Regional Office and/or DET if necessary. All emergency or criminal activity, in which the safety or well-being of staff or students is at risk, or where there is a threat to property, must be reported immediately to the Department's 24 hour Security Services Unit on **(03) 9589 6266**.

3.13 Continue to keep staff, students and parents informed, especially about what has happened and what the school is doing about it.

3.14 As soon as possible call students together and provide information about what has happened and what the school is doing about it. A follow up letter home may be important.

3.15 Provide counselling services for all. Ensure that there are suitable places in which this can take place. Be prepared to modify the timetable and other arrangements so that people are free to make use of available help.

3.16 The class teacher may be the person to whom students first turn for help.

- 3.17** Children wishing to attend funerals should do so in the company of their parents. Provide meaningful participation for those not actually attending the service.
- 3.18** Continue normal routines at school but acknowledge the effect of tragedy on the school community. Be flexible with those in need of help. Be aware that many people may be deeply affected, e.g. an event may cause a person to recall some traumatic event involving them in the past. The anniversary may also be a difficult time.
- 3.19** Maintain links with the family. The school and family may wish to develop a memorial garden, erect a memorial plaque, or display a photo in a prominent position in the school.
- 3.20** Be sensitive to staff and student's needs over a period of time.

LINKS AND APPENDICES (including processes related to this policy)

Links which are connected with this policy are:

<https://headspace.org.au/>

School Postvention Tool Kit. <https://headspace.org.au/schools/category/responding-to-a-suicide>

Appendices which are connected with this policy are:

- Appendix A: Benalla P-12 College Critical Incident/Suicide/Other Death Postvention Response Plan
- Appendix B: Critical or Traumatic Incident Plan – First 24 hour Short Term Tasks
- Appendix C: Emergency Message Record Form – Template

4. EVALUATION

Evaluation of the Plans will follow any critical incident at the school.

Benalla P-12 College – Critical Incident/Suicide/Other Death Postvention Response Plan

Emergency Response Team (ERT)

- Principal **(P)**: Tony Clark
- Assistant Principals **(AP)**: Reno Lia, Rebecca Pell, Jo Treacy, Heather Leary
- Sub School Leader **(SSL)**:
- Co-ordinator **(YLC)/Level Leader**:
- Mentor Teacher **(MT)/Class teacher**:
- School Councillor **(SWC)**:
- School Nurse **(SN)**: Mel Jackson
- Senior Education Improvement Leader **(SEIL)**: Alby Freijah
- Student Support Services **(SSS)**: Christine Downing
- Business Manager **(BM)**: Leanne Fry

Role of ERT is to ensure:

- The wellbeing of all members of the school community is monitored and protected;
- All responsibilities undertaken efficiently;
- Accurate and consistent advice is provided to students, staff and parents; and
- No single member of staff assumes the full burden of responsibility.

Responsibilities of ERT Members and Postvention Checklist: **First 24 hours**

Stage	Target	Responsibility	Who	Time	Date	Team Member Name	
Information Gathering		If Incident happens at school:	P, AP				
							Tick
		1. Ensure the immediate safety of school staff and students.					1
							2
		2. 000 call to ambulance and police.					3
							4
		3. Provide first aid.					5
							6
		4. Contact school administration office.					1
							2
		5. IRIS alert					3
							4
		6. Contact SEIL					
If the incident has happened outside of school:							
1. Find out as many of the facts and circumstances as possible.							
2. Confirm facts with police.							
3. IRIS Alert							
4. Contact SEIL							

INFORM	ERT Briefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the Emergency Response Team for a briefing: • Develop script and letters home (Headspace kit)-<i>must be confirmed</i> • Delegate tasks to the ERT • Contact DET Media Unit (03 9637 2871 24hrs) • Identify close friends and vulnerable students 	P/AP SSS AP P / AP / SEIL			
	Action undertaken:					
INFORM	Staff: Teachers, Support Staff And Wellbeing Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform staff ASAP and keep them well-informed about all relevant information regarding the suicide and the response plan (inclusive of staff on leave). Inform staff that all media enquiries are to be directed to the office for the principal only. 	P/BM			
		Action undertaken:				
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Inform staff of the option of not being involved if their own well-being is at risk 3. 	P/BM			
		Action undertaken:				
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Inform staff of support they can access (Employee Assistance Program) 	P/BM			
Action undertaken:						

Parents	<p>5. Inform staff that the students will be notified in their Mentor Groups or first session class via script.</p> <p>Identify close friends, vulnerable students and affected staff</p> <p>Action undertaken:</p>	<p>P, AP</p> <p>YLC, MT, SWC</p>			
	<p>1. Inform the parents of close friends and vulnerable students to ensure support at home (telephone). Document those who have been called on SENTRAL.</p> <p>Action undertaken:</p>	<p>P/AP/SSL/YLC/MT/SWC</p>			
	<p>2. Inform all parents via letter/email to give them immediate and accurate information (letter prepared in office ready to distribute)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note: Parent consent from family affected must be obtained before any letter is sent home. • Legal Unit must approve letter <p>Action undertaken:</p>	<p>P/AP/BM</p>			
	<p>3. Provide parents with contact information for support for them and their children (with letter home). <i>Resources needed: Headspace School Support Toolkit p35. Resources must be reviewed prior to sending for suitability.</i></p>	<p>SSS/BM</p>			

	Students	Action undertaken:			
		1. Inform close friends and vulnerable students personally and provide sources of immediate and ongoing support by:	YLC/MT/AP/BM		
		Action undertaken:			
		2. Inform students using the agreed script in small groups, with consideration of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends closest to the student • Students in the same year level • Students in the same class as sibling • Home groups or year level groups preferable <i>Resources needed: Headspace School Support Toolkit p33-34</i>	Teachers/MT/YLC		
	Community	Action undertaken:			
		1. Inform all auxiliary adults who will have contacts with students in the following 24 hours. Identify close friends and vulnerable students	P/AP		
		Action undertaken:			
		2. Inform Principals of schools within the area, specifically those attended by the student’s siblings or known close friends	P/AP		
Action undertaken:					

Contact Numbers:

Security Services Unit (IRIS)	9589 6266	
Legal Advice	9637 3146	
DET Media Unit	9637 2871	
Headspace Albury/Wodonga	(02) 6055 9555	
Benalla Police	5760 0200	
NECAMHS Wangaratta	5723 8900	

SUPPORT

Staff

1. Identify and plan for staff at risk	ERT			
Action undertaken:				
2. Encourage staff to contact Employee Assistance Program if they require additional support	AP			
Action undertaken:				
3. Inform staff of identified liaison person (to be nominated)	AP			
Action undertaken:				
4. Provide staff with the details of information being provided to parents and students.	AP			
Action undertaken:				
5. Check in with staff at the start and end of the day for wellbeing and consistent messaging	AP			
Action undertaken:				
1. Establish a line of support with the family of the deceased student	AP/P/SWC			
Action undertaken:				
2. Gather and protect student belongings	YLC			
Action undertaken:				
3. Encourage parents in the school community to access mental health services and referral pathways if needed. Connect with community supports/referral.	P/AP/SN/SWC			
Action undertaken:				
4. Determine time, location and personnel for a parent information and support session.	ERT			

		Give consideration to a breakout space for distressed parents (eg PAC). <i>Resources needed: See p16 of the Headspace School Support Toolkit</i>					
		Action undertaken:					
	Students	1. Immediately follow up on all unexplained absences	YLC				
		Action undertaken:					
		2. Set up a student support room that is staffed with appropriate personnel: Wellbeing Centre or Board Room. 3. Wellbeing Team to attend classes as required	AP/SN/SWC				
		Action undertaken:					
		4. Work collaboratively with Regional SSS and others (Headspace, School Nurses, NECAMHS) to identify and plan support for students at risk	ERT				
		Action undertaken:					
	5. Monitor students and, in collaboration with mental health agency, begin assessment of students identified as at risk. <i>Resources needed: headspace School Support Toolkit p11-12 for more information</i>	ERT					
	Action undertaken:						
Other	1. Consider who needs information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying risk factors for suicide Understanding grief responses Referral pathways to support services 	SWC/SN/YLC					
	Action undertaken:						

<h1>MANAGE</h1>	<h2>Media</h2>	1. Consider the need for an appropriate media response	P/AP / SEIL				
		Action undertaken:					
		2. Contact the School's Governing Body media Unit (03 96372871 24hrs) or headspace School Support for advice	P/AP / SEIL				
		Action undertaken:					
	<h2>Social Media</h2>	3. Consult Suicide Postvention Toolkit/Guidelines or headspace School Support fact sheet	ERT				
		Action undertaken:					
		1. Consider the impact of social media	SSL/YLC				
		Action undertaken:					
	<h2>ERT</h2>	2. Consult with headspace School Support for ongoing management of social media. <i>Resources needed: headspace School Support Toolkit, p30</i>	AP				
		Action undertaken:					
1. Undertake self-care: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief everyday • Identify a self-care activity for each member • Discuss coping mechanisms • Watch for signs of vicarious trauma (just cannot do anything more) • Ensure that staff can take a break from the response if required 		ERT					
Action undertaken:							

References:

1. DEET (2013) *Guidelines to Assist in Responding to Attempted Suicide or Suicide by a Student*
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/health/suicideguidelines.pdf>
2. *School Postvention Toolkit*
School Postvention Tool Kit. <https://headspace.org.au/schools/category/responding-to-a-suicide>

ERT Postvention Checklist

Immediate response (see Section A)

- If the incident has happened at school: Ensure the immediate safety of school staff and students (eg. provide first aid, call ambulance and police).
- If the incident has happened away from school: Find out as many of the facts and circumstances as possible. Do not ignore rumours – investigate them immediately.
- Confirm facts with the family and/or police.
- Ensure those affected (students/parents/staff) are not left alone.

The first 24 hours (see Section B)

- Inform the relevant representative at the Department of Education (or equivalent body for your school).

Convene the Emergency Response Team (ERT) and plan the following steps:

- Contact the relevant mental health agency.
- Familiarise yourself with the Headspace
- Identify and plan support for students who are at risk.
- Set up a student support room in the school.
- Inform staff. Give them a script explaining what has happened, so that all staff are giving students that same consistent message. **Note: Consult the family for the preferred wording they want for informing the community.**
- Inform students via a script. Do this in small groups, not at a whole school assembly.
- Do not describe the method of suicide.
- Inform the wider community via a letter.
- Contact the media liaison advisor in the central office of your relevant education authority (the Department of Education or equivalent authority for non-government schools). Refer all media enquiries to that office.

The first week (see Section C)

- Restore the school to its regular routine.
- Liaise with the bereaved/affected family.
- **Plan the school's involvement in the funeral.**
- Organise regular staff meetings, to ensure they are provided with up to date information.

- Monitor students and, in collaboration with the relevant mental health agency, begin assessments of students identified as being at risk.
- Monitor staff wellbeing and provide opportunities for debriefing.
- Keep parents informed via notices.
- Collect all the belongings of the deceased student for the police and family.
- Continue documenting all the school's actions.

The first month (see Section D)

- Monitor staff and student wellbeing.
- Plan for relevant events that will be held by the school (year book photographs, award nights, graduation)
- Gather information from staff that is relevant for a critical incident review.
- Conduct a critical incident review.
- Consider offering parents and/or the community information sessions with a mental health agency.
- Continue documentation of all the school's actions.

Longer term (see Section E)

- Continue to support and monitor students and staff.
- Keep parents, staff and students informed.
- Plan for anniversaries, birthdays and other significant events.
- Implement the recommendations of the critical incident review.
- Include your school's postvention plan in its staff induction process.

Appendix B

Critical or Traumatic Incident Plan – First 24 hour Short Term Tasks

Responsibilities and Procedures

1. Emergency Record

Record Information

- nature of the incident
- location of the incident, number and names of persons involved
- name of the person reporting the incident
- time incident reported
- contact telephone number if away from school

Verify all Details

- confirm that the information given about the event is accurate

Record the Incident

- notify principal workplace coordinator
- ensure emergency services have been called notify the Department's 24 hour Emergency Communications Centre on **(03) 9589 6266**.

- 2. Ensure students and staff are safe from harm or injury**
- student Managers and Year Level Coordinators cordon off any 'crisis' area and keep students away from there
 - manage the grounds while staff are briefed and ensure media do not intrude
 - check corridors, toilets etc for stray students - try to prevent students leaving on their own particularly if distressed
 - send all very stressed students to the designated Recovery area
 - ensure that all parents are SMS'd with the appropriate information ASAP.
 - ensure the school continues as normally as possible.

3. Establish Emergency Response Team (ERT)
The composition of the Recovery Team will be:

- the Principal
- the Assistant Principals
- a member of the teaching staff
- a member of the Educational Support staff (first aid trained)
- other support staff as appropriate
- as necessary, psychologists, counsellors and DET personnel.

4. Allocate Responsibilities

- Ring 000
- emergency message register
- emergency contact list
- evacuation and assembly of staff and students
- cordon off area of 'crisis'
- establish a Support Team and Communications Centre to:
 - manage information and phone calls
 - coordinate media requests for information
 - provide information to parents arriving at school
 - coordinate routine school activities – maintain where practical
 - notify students, staff and ancillary about the emergency
 - notify parents first, and then siblings in the school
 - establish a recovery room and supervisor for affected students
 - establish a waiting room for parents
 - inform students
 - inform School Council
 - inform School Community by newsletter
 - monitor School Community's reactions
 - liaise with outside agencies and emergency services
 - brief key personnel and review responses

4.1 Recovery Room(s)

Set Up Recovery Room

- set up Library, and if necessary the Staffroom
 - empty adjoining rooms if possible and relocate to other rooms
 - screen windows
 - have available pens, textas, paper, scissors, envelopes, tissues
- Appoint Recovery Room Supervisors*

- First Aid staff

Recovery Room Supervisors' Responsibilities

- keep calm
- monitor students for shock reactions, provide first aid if necessary
- encourage students to gather in small friendship groups rather than bigger ones
- keep a list of students attending the recovery room
- give the students a task to undertake such as making a card or writing a letter

- contact parents of students who remain in the recovery room and alert them to possible concerns

5. Informing Staff

- provide teachers and ancillary staff with a brief outline of the incident
- Restate to ensure that staff understand and it sinks in
- outline recovery management arrangements
- discuss procedures to be followed by staff during the day
- discuss the general procedures that Critical Incident Team will be following
- discuss guidelines for informing students and ways of answering questions from them
- give staff time to discuss this among themselves
- provide a brief factual outline to others in the community on a need to know basis
- inform staff as soon as possible about a serious emergency involving death or injury which occurs after hours, on the weekend or during the school holidays
- inform staff as soon as possible about arrangements for holding a brief meeting before informing students at the start of the next school day
- review with staff afterwards any issues and needs
- provide staff with contact numbers for counselling or support services for themselves

6. Informing Students

Principal or senior staff

- contact the bereaved family or police to ascertain what information may be released within the school
- prepare a written factual statement, without graphic detail, for use as a reference by teachers when discussing the incident with students
- determine whether to tell students about the incident at a whole school assembly, by year levels or individual classes, depending on the nature of the incident
- discuss with teachers who feel uncomfortable raising the event with students and arrange for support from another teacher or a member of the recovery team
- identify staff who may be too distraught to take classes and arrange replacements
- inform students soon after briefing staff
- ask teachers to mark a roll to identify who has been informed and who has not

Teachers

- provide a factual account of the incident at the beginning of the first class in a way that ensures all students hears the same information
- limit speculation and rumours
- inform students about arrangements of counselling and recovery rooms
- inform students about arrangements for services, and appropriate ways to express condolences
- outline the arrangements for the day

Notifying close friends

- notify close friends especially girl friends and boyfriends prior to making an announcement to other students
- take these students aside when they arrive at school and inform them privately
- consider contacting their parents
- prior to the start of the day
- ensure individual attention is given to intimate friends who are likely to have special needs beyond those of other students

7. **Communication Centre**

Organise the following to be on hand:

- telephone - dedicated line in case of jamming by incoming calls
- telephone message if necessary
- message records
- phone lists
- rolls
- excursion list
- timetable
- maps
- computer and printer
- photocopier
- display instructions
- If required seek advice from 'Advice Manager of Operations and Emergency Management 83929579/0427895398

8. **Media Coverage**

- nominate a media coordinator, prepare the School Council President and Principal to provide on camera interviews
- contact DET Media Unit on 9637 2871 or 9264 5821
- prepare a three paragraph report:
 - briefly outline the facts
 - outline what the school has done to assist those affected
 - outline support and recovery arrangements
 - include a name and contact number for the school media coordinator
- liaise with the family about any statements made to media
- exclude discussion of policy matters, limit comment to the emergency and the school response
- set rules for persistent media
- keep a record of media enquiries
- of scheduled interviews in return for media commitment not to seek uninvited access to staff, students, parents
- negotiate accepted areas for filming e.g. school/church boundary and not within
- check that information provided does not conflict with court requirements or police proceedings
- anticipate renewed interest arising from anniversaries, court proceedings.

9. **Long Term Actions**

- monitor and support members of the school community, particularly on significant dates such as anniversaries
- consider longer term intervention activities such as counselling or specialist support
- consider establishing an area within the school as a place of remembrance
- reconvene key people at regular intervals to review the school response and effectiveness of planning arrangements
- review the school emergency management plan in light of experience gained
- consider a ritual of marking significant dates
- prepare for legal proceedings if necessary
- remove students name from the roll if deceased
- consider article in school magazine

**Appendix C
Emergency Record Form – Template**

Date: / ___ /
 Time of notification: _ ____ : ____ am/pm
 Name of person taking the call _____
 Position: _____
 Name of person reporting the incident _____
 Contact telephone number _____

Details

Describe:

Where everyone is now

What action is being taken to help?

Who: _____
 When: _____
 Where: _____
 How: _____
 Nature and extent of injury: _____

Immediate Actions Required

Principal notified? 0409 034 480	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Time: _____ : _____ am/pm
Other school staff?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Time: _____ : _____ am/pm
Emergency Services notified? 132 500	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Time: _____ : _____ am/pm
Emergency & Security Management notified? (03) 9589 6266	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Time: _____ : _____ am/pm

Emergency Contact Telephone Numbers

POLICE	000
AMBULANCE	000
FIRE BRIGADE	000
STATE EMERGENCY SERVICES (SES)	132 500
LOCAL POLICE (Benalla Police Station)	(03) 57600200
LOCAL HOSPITAL (Benalla Health)	(03) 57602222
LOCAL FIRE BRIGADE (Benalla Fire Station)	(03) 57622743
ASSISTANT REGIONAL DIRECTOR (Judy Rose)	(03) 83929500 or 0458318474
EMERGENCY SECURITY MANAGEMENT	(03) 9589 6266 (24 hour service)

Emergency Message Record Form

Time: ____ : ____ : am/pm

Message from _____

Action required? Yes No

If 'YES', please detail:

Completed

Message taken by _____

Emergency Message Record

Time: ____ : ____ : am/pm

Message from _____

Action required? Yes No

If 'YES', please detail:

Completed

Message taken by _____

Basis for discretion:

The basis for discretion lies with the Principal as an operational matter.

Date Implemented	March 2013
Reviewed and Amended Version One:	May, 2016

Date of ratification by School Council: September, 2018

Recommended date for review: September, 2020